Preparation and the Outline

A. The questions you want to ask at the beginning are:

1. What is the assignment and do you understand the particulars? If not you need to check with your instructor.
2. Once you are sure of the assignment and the directions. What tips and resources does the instructor and course offer.
3. What type of research paper will you be writing? Is it subject-based or argumentative for example.
4. What are the choices for topics or can you choose your own?
5. Consider who your readers will be. Will your material be relevant to them?

B. Prewriting strategies – Outline development

1. There are two basic types of outlining used in planning a piece of writing, particularly an essay or research paper. The informal outline is often used in the shorter essay format, and the formal outline is used for longer essays and research papers. The amount of time you spend in the planning stage can drastically reduce the time actually spent in the writing stage. Planning your essay on paper rather than in your head can also show you whether you have included all necessary details and organized them in the best order. Outlines are just one way to do this.

C. Here are a few rules for preparing an outline:

1. Include your thesis statement
2. Always have more than one sub-division
3. Choose a structure and stick with it.
   a. Sample Outline Format:

1) Introduction
   a) Hook to interest reader
      i) I never thought it would happen.
      ii) I had a hard time meeting people.
      iii) The bank teller helped me meet my first love!
      iv) I was amazed and thankful.

2) Body
   a) History of the bank teller
      i) I’ve been coming to this bank since I was a child.
      ii) I have had this teller for five years or so.
      iii) He was older, friendly and always there to take my deposits.
      iv) We chatted about how I had a hard time meeting people.
   b) The meeting
      i) One day, I went to the bank, and the teller was talking to a man in line.
      ii) The teller introduced me to his friend, Jonathan.
      iii) Jonathan and I had the bank in common, but we found out we also both bowled at the same alley.
iv) We exchanged phone numbers and had our first date.

c) The relationship
   i) Jonathan and I continued to date.
   ii) We got engaged.
   iii) We are going to be married.

3) Conclusion
   a) We still talk about how we met through the bank teller.
   b) We are so happy to have met one another.
   c) Thesis restatement
      i) You just never know who will help you out in life.
      ii) Therefore, be good to those you meet and take no one for granted!

D. Other outline or organizational formats:

**SAMPLE MIND MAP FOR PERILS OF PLAGIARISM**

A variation of making a mind map is clustering. Clustering can be a helpful organizational tool for visual thinkers. Very simply, it is getting information down on paper and noting the connections between ideas – often putting them in clusters. As above, this could look similar to a car wheel. The center hub of the wheel is the main idea that you are trying to develop. Each spoke could represent a subdivision that would support your main idea. From there you could branch out further. For an explanation of clustering with examples, visit the following site: [http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/cluster.html](http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/cluster.html)

Using an outline can save far more time in rewriting than you will use initially in creating the outline. More important, it is an easy way to see if you have included all the main points you want to make in your research paper and if you have arranged them in a logical order. It can be easier to rearrange items when they are in outline form than to rearrange them once they are in the body of the research paper.

A good outline will provide you with a visual “map” to follow when you begin writing your paper. The more organized and detailed the outline, the more organized and detailed your research paper will be.